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ABSTRACT

Classroom groups work on two levels. The first is the level of the surface task with which the group is immediately concerned. The second level includes the hidden agendas of participants in the group. These are the undisclosed personal goals, needs, and aspirations of individuals. One way in which teachers can discover the hidden agendas of their students is through role playing. This process can create an awareness of underlying motivations which govern an individual's behavior in a group. Suggestions are made in this paper for organizing effective role playing activities in the classroom. A brief profile is presented of individual reactions in a group setting, and pointers are offered for teachers and supervisors for handling hidden agendas. (JD)

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SUPERVISORS TAKE A LOOK: HIDDEN AGENDAS CAN INFLUENCE THE ATMOSPHERE IN AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

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SUPERVISORS TAKE A LOOK:
HIDDEN AGENDAS CAN INFLUENCE THE
ATMOSPHERE IN AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

One area where there has generally been a lack of knowledge among educators is the area of hidden agendas. Every supervisor must learn to recognize and deal with hidden agendas because they can influence the classroom learning atmosphere and the objectives of a particular lesson. This article is written to acquaint supervisors who work with teachers with hidden agendas. Supervisors can then help teachers recognize hidden agendas.

WHAT IS A HIDDEN AGENDA?

Classroom groups work on two levels. The first is the level of the surface task, with which the group is immediately concerned(goals and lesson objectives). The second level includes the hidden needs of group members, their hidden agendas. Sometimes hidden agendas can siphon off valuable energy that could be used for accomplishment of the lesson objectives. Hidden agendas are personal goals that students want their classmates to help them achieve. They may even be the personal goals a teacher wants the students or supervisor to help him/her achieve. These hidden agendas are not always malicious or even conscious attempts to disrupt the group process.

example 1 (student): Hidden agenda that is not malicious- Mary is a student with many

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talents but in the past has not applied herself. All of a sudden, over a three week period, the quality of her work has improved to the point where she has received excellent evaluations. On further investigation it is discovered that Mary is not working to learn the material but that her hidden agenda is to earn excellent grades because her grandfather has promised her five dollars for every A she receives on her report card.

example 2 (teacher): Hidden agenda that is not malicious- Larry is a member of a curriculum committee. The goal of the committee is to write a curriculum for social studies and select materials appropriate to that curriculum. Larry has a specific text that requires little planning and preparation to use that he wants to have selected. He works in the committee to help write a curriculum that will make his selected text look like the perfect material to fit the curriculum. That is Larry's hidden agenda.

example 3 (teacher): Hidden agenda that is malicious- Jim is very jealous of Bill, who is an excellent teacher. Everytime Bill makes an excellent contribution to the group Jim tries to claim it as his or attacks the contribution very vocally. Jim's actions are symptoms of his hidden agenda, jealousy.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT HIDDEN AGENDAS?

Suggestions for supervisors to use with teachers.

Supervisors must help teachers remember that students in

a group have to fulfill personal needs. Their behavior in the group is in direct relationship to their needs. Teachers must observe and make sure student needs do not hinder the group from accomplishing its goals. Teachers should assist individuals so their needs are met in ways that do not raise conflict, confusion, or obstacles for other members in relation to the group's surface task. Supervisors must help teachers recognize their own hidden agendas that may be influencing their teaching.

Helping teachers learn about hidden agendas. One excellent way of helping teachers learn about hidden agendas is through role playing. Pfeiffer (1972) has an excellent role playing program titled, "Hidden Agendas". The goal of the role playing is, "To create an awareness of underlying motivations which govern an individual's behavior in a group." (pp. 36-47)

Luft (1963) has presented an excellent way in which relationships between and among individuals in groups can be graphically visualized. It is presented here so that persons working with children and adults will have an overall view of themselves and others and will be able to see how hidden agendas fit into the relationships within classroom groups. (see figure 1)

Pfeiffer (1974), Braden (1955), and Bradford (1978) all make suggestions that could be used by supervisors to show teachers how to handle and what to do about hidden agendas. (see figure 2)

Figure 1

The Johari Window

1.) Free to self and others. On top of the table. OPEN	2.) Blind to self, seen by others. BLIND
3.) Hidden agenda under the table. HIDDEN	4.) Quadrant of the unknown. UNKNOWN

Luft explains the Johari Window as:

> Quadrant 1, the area of free activity, or open area, refers to behavior and motivation known to self and known to others.
>
> Quadrant 2, the blind area, is where others can see things in ourselves of which we are unaware.
>
> Quadrant 3, the avoided or hidden area, represents things we know but do not reveal to others (e.g., a hidden agenda or matters about which we have sensitive feelings).
>
> Quadrant 4, the area of unknown activity, points to the area where neither the individual nor others are aware of certain behaviors or motives. Yet we can assume their existence because eventually some of these things become known, and we then realize that these unknown behaviors and motives were influencing relationships all along. (p. 12)

Figure 2

Suggestions

1. Teachers should look for hidden agendas and learn to recognize their presence.
2. Remember that the group is continuously working at two levels at once.
3. Encourage participants to identify and bring into the open their hidden desires.
4. Strive to solve hidden problems. If you can identify a hidden agenda try to meet it.
5. The teacher should not criticize the group for the presence of hidden agendas; they are legitimate and must be worked with just like the surface task. The amount of attention that should be given to hidden agendas depends on the degree of their influence on the group's task.
6. The teacher should help the group find means of solving hidden agendas.
7. The teacher should help the group remove feelings of guilt about hidden agendas.

Functional roles of group members. Two authors have included lists that classify group member roles. Benne (1978) and Rosenfeld (1973) both include lists of group task roles, group building roles, and individual roles developed by First National Training Laboratory (1947). Of the twenty-seven roles included the eight individual roles could be hidden agendas in themselves. (see figure 3)

Summary. Groups work on two levels: the surface task and the hidden task. A hidden agenda is a level of undisclosed needs and motives of individuals in a group. Attitudes, aspirations, and values affect hidden agendas. Hidden agendas can influence a classroom's learning atmosphere because they take up valuable time and energy that could be used to

Figure 3

Individual Roles

The Aggressor---may work in many ways--deflating the status of others, expressing disapproval of the values, acts or feelings of others, attacking the group or the problem it is working on, joking aggressively, showing envy toward another's contribution by trying to take credit for it, etc.

The Blocker---tends to be negativistic and stubbornly resistant, disagreeing and opposing without or beyond reason and attempting to maintain or bring back an issue after the group has rejected or bypassed it.

The Recognition-seeker---works in various ways to call attention to himself.

The Self-confessor---uses the audience opportunity which the group setting provides to express personal, non-group-oriented "feeling," "insight," "ideology," etc.

The Playboy---makes a display of his lack of involvement in the group's processes. This may take the form of cynicism, nonchalance, horseplay and other more or less studied forms of "out-of-field" behavior.

The Dominator---tries to assert authority or superiority in manipulating the group or certain members of the group.

The Help-seeker---attempts to call forth "sympathy" response from other group members or from the whole group, whether through expressions of insecurity, personal confusion or depreciation of himself beyond reason.

The Special interest pleader---speaks for the special interests of others but is really cloaking his own prejudices or biases in the stereotype which best fits his individual need.

accomplish the task at hand(ongoing lesson).

Hidden agendas are not necessarily malicious or conscious attempts to disrupt the group process. They can be held by group members(students), the teacher, and/or

the group itself. They can even be held by members of the community, school board members, administrators, and supervisors.

Teachers should be award of the many functional roles of group members. The Johari Window can be used by supervisors to help teachers learn of the relationships between and among individuals in a group. Role playing is generally an easy way for teachers and supervisors to learn the importance of hidden agendas. Hidden agendas can influence the atmosphere in an educational setting.

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